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DEAR EDITOR,—I do not know if you remember my account of my swallows last year in the *Parents' Review*. The dear birds have repaired their old nest on the picture, and the little hen sits happily on five eggs.

With kind regards, yours truly,
AGNES F. FARREN.

Bealings House, Great Bealings, Woodbridge,
June 5th, 1901.

DEAR EDITOR,—Is any member willing to part with some of the Mothers' Educational Course books for the second year's course at half price? Yours truly, L. HARBAGE.

Chestnut House, Wellesbourne, Warwick.

DEAR EDITOR,—I taught a Melbourne gentleman on the voyage to New Zealand how to do chair-caning. He was very interested in watching Alfred do it, and wanted to know exactly how it was done, so I offered to show him. He said he had two married sons living in the bush quite away from any town, and they would be very pleased to know how to cane chairs, as when their own wanted re-caning they had to replace the seats by wooden ones.

Truly yours, M. D.

DEAR EDITOR,—I venture to send a list of books which has been intensely liked by my quartette, 16-10—the two eldest boys—to whom I read them aloud:—

Winifred, Baring Gould.
Reds of the Midi, *The Terror*, *The White Terror*, Felix Gras, translated from French.
Boy Crusoes, Leon Goldschmann, translated from Russian. Blackie.
Tom Sawyer's Adventures, Mark Twain.
Half Hours in Japan, Rev. H. Moore. Fisher Unwin.
The Way the World went then.
Legend Led, *Brownie*, *Roses*, Amy le Feuvre. R.T.S.
The wonderful City of Tokio, *Young Americans in Japan*, Edward Grey. Dillingham, New York.
Clear Round! Sampson Low.
Our Boys in India, *Our Boys in China*, by H. French. Dillingham, New York.
Red Cloud, Sir W. Butler.
How Dick and Molly went round the world, by H. C. Leigh. E. Arnold, London.

All Frank Bullen's books are greatly liked.

Truly yours,
A MOTHER.

THE
PARENTS' REVIEW
A MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.
"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

Vol. XII. No. 10.] [OCTOBER, 1901.

THE RING AND THE BOOK,*

(*An Appreciation.*)

BY E. A. SKURRAY.

A HUMAN Document! such it does indeed deserve to be called, with its marvellous knowledge of the human heart. Once attack it boldly, and it cannot fail to command the most intense interest of thoughtful minds. We feel it is destined to immortality: "It lives—if precious be the soul of man to man." In it we find the keenest analysis of character and motive, the most subtle of psychological dissertations.

When it first appeared, Swinburne tells us, it was received with a burst of surprise and wonder: to quote his own words —and we remember he is himself a master of form—"The greatness of so colossal a masterpiece, the masterpiece of so great a genius! as the whole world of English readers rose to acclaim on the appearance of *The Ring and the Book*."

"The masterpiece of a master" describes it exactly; yet it is quite possible we may have shrunk from the study of it as a whole, partly because it is so long, and long things get crowded out; then, the method Browning employs is so entirely original and the average reader shrinks from the unfamiliar, for it is neither a drama nor an epic. He takes the story, the tragedy, and gives us types of the world's opinion from different sides and points of view: it is a style which in a master's hand can be made intensely dramatic.

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* Readers of the *Love Letters* of Mr. and Mrs. Browning will discover whence the poet drew his inspiration for Pompilia.

This is the poet's way of sifting the truth, and then he pronounces a final judgment, which is virtually done in the person and office of the grand old Pope. As Dean Church says,* "In such piercing insight into human realities, such magnanimity, there is the awfulness and certainty of Divine judgment."

Another obstacle is that old cry about "obscurities," of which some of us are a little tired. Obscurities no doubt there are, but they are by no means so numerous as many would have us believe. A great portion of this poem is quite clear, and reminds us of a mighty river flowing on until it mingles with the ocean of eternal verities. It demands our close attention from the very fulness of its flood-tide. There are also the many side issues, with which readers of Browning are so familiar—more especially in Books VIII. and IX., when the nimble-witted counsel dart off into all kinds of allusions, personal and otherwise. That parts are unequal, that it may sometimes be possible to criticise the rhythm, is no doubt true, but the dramatic power is so great that you are simply carried away– you forget to criticise, for you are in a master's hand who plays on your heart-strings as he will.

We purpose to follow the story in the poet's own way. First, we have the well-known facts of the old book, picked up in Florence—the effect it had on Browning—how it took possession of him :—

> "A spirit laughs and leaps in every limb
> And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair;
> Letting me have my will again with them."

How quaint the conception of the ring—the gold of Truth wrought into form through the alloy of Fancy. He bids us "hold that figure fast." His passion—the fire which melted the gold ore, his genius—the artificer who moulded, transformed it, till

> "Fancy with fact is just one fact the more,
> To wit that fancy has reformed, transpierced."

But we must be prepared for the usual Browning eccentricities; as Dean Church has told us, he not only does not always sing with his poet's robes about him, "but even

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* In his *Life*, by his Daughter.

sometimes in his shirt-sleeves, making faces at us"; like Dante, he uses words however uncouth if they best express his meaning. Many passages might be quoted. Take these :—

> "The broken sword has served to stir a Jakes."
> . . . .
> "Mimic the tetchy humour, furtive glance."
> . . . .
> "Lay fitful in a tenebrific time."
> . . . .
> "Marmoreal neck and bosom uberose."

Our sympathy is demanded for no fleeting passion of a day, but rather for one of the eternal wellsprings of human nature—the old old story of "The Mother and the Child."

His tragedy is a contrast to Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," that story of the unfaithful wife not sufficiently noble to live up to her husband's high ideal, with the dire confusion which was its direct issue. For no guilty passion or the power of a great temptation is our interest invoked, but for the innocent child-wife married to a middle-aged, repulsive man. It might be called the apotheosis of innocence and motherhood, for it is with this last her soul awakes :—

> "The strange and passionate precipitance
> Of maiden startled into motherhood,
> Which changes body and soul by Nature's law,
> And there is born a blood pulse in her heart
> To fight if need be, though with flap of wing."

In teeth of circumstances we are asked to believe in Pompilia's innocence, and we do believe it.

In Book I. we have the statement of facts of the "Roman Murder Case," and are shewn how "Action now shrouds, now shews the informing thought." The characters, though only sketched in with a few bold graphic strokes, are done in so masterly a way we know them at once; more especially is this the case with the Pope, who knew the hearts of men because he had first searched his own. At the end of this book we have that exquisite dedication of Browning to his wife :—

> "O lyric love, half angel and half bird,
> And all a wonder and a wild desire."

Briefly told, the story is this. We have the old couple, the Comparini; Violante the wife tells Pietro the husband that late in life she is going to give birth to a child, Pompilia. When she is only about thirteen Violante marries her to Count Guido Franceschini without the knowledge of her husband. It is a purely worldly transaction on both sides: Violante thinking thereby to promote her child in life; Guido, a pauper nobleman who has failed to achieve success as a hanger-on in the train of the Pope (for which purpose he has taken minor orders), looking to retrieve his fortunes by the promised dowry. The Comparini accompany the newly married couple to Guido's home, but illtreated and mulcted by him they leave in disgust. Pompilia is left behind, as a lamb exposed to the fury of a wolf. They return to Rome, and hope to break up the marriage by spreading the story that Pompilia is not their child, but the "illicit offspring of a common trull." Then the tragedy begins: the miserable life Guido leads his wretched wife, who submits to it with a death-like patience, until she feels another life depends upon her own, then tries to save herself by escaping from him in an appeal to those who should uphold the law—first to divine authority in the person of the Archbishop, then to civil in the Governor. Neither will help her, and the final escape comes through the very trap her husband placed for her in the Canon Caponsacchi. She flies from home under his protection; Rome is nearly reached when they are overtaken at the inn. Guido, too cowardly to fight Caponsacchi, who is in semi-secular attire, appeals to law, which gives no decided answer, but banishes the former for a time and sends Pompilia to the Convent of the Convertites. After a time she is allowed to return to the Comparini to a villa outside Rome, where she gives birth to her son, whom she places in safety. There Guido comes with four accomplices; the door is opened, when he treacherously asks in the name of Caponsacchi; all three are murdered.

In this story Browning's object is to justify the sentence of the Pope and vindicate Pompilia's innocence; this he does by each aspect of the story, either directly or indirectly, bringing something forward to elucidate the mystery.

In Books II. and III., *Half Rome* and *The other Half Rome*, we have the "for" and "against" Guido; in Book IV., *Tertium Quid*, the worldly opinion as it strikes an average. There is also the counsel for and against and at the end *The Book and the Ring*.

From this stand out four characters, drawn with that perfect art which is truer than actual life, for it is life translated and transmuted by its process through the brain of man.*

Browning has himself given us a vivid description of a sister art, how a great picture is painted. You make your sketches from the life, a face here, a hand or a body there, yet you do not give them to the world in that crude condition, but

> "Filtered through the eye
> His brain deposit bred of many a drop, *e pluribus unum*,"

and thus you produce a picture more really true to life.

Standing out from the accessories of his picture we have four great portraits—Caponsacchi, Pompilia, Guido and the Pope.

Book II.—*Half Rome*. In this the husband's side is fairly put, and is an instance of how entirely dramatic Browning can be, and how completely he can sink his personality in that of his subject. We have Guido as the injured middle-aged husband whose wife has left him for a young and handsome lover. To do so she has drugged Guido—possibly the household—has taken his money and valuables, and is discovered at the inn near Rome with Caponsacchi. Guido produces the letters she and the former were supposed to have written to each other: they are self-condemnatory. It is all told with keen incision, and a kind of cynical fairness.

Book III.—*The other Half Rome* inclines toward the wife. The twice-told tale never wearies, for it is given from a different point of view, and so vivid and dramatic is it we are carried along. Guido now stands out for what he is—"The ignoble noble, the unmanly man, the beast below the beast in brutishness."

Towards Pompilia all our sympathies go out, wounded to death, yet lingering on by a miracle, it is said in answer to prayer—"Which seems to have been the single prayer she ever put up that was granted her."

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* cf., the same idea in *The Winter's Tale:*

> ". . . . this is an art
> Which does mend nature—change it rather; but
> The art itself is nature."

This book begins with those exquisite lines,—

"Another day and finds her living yet,
Little Pompilia with the patient brow
And lamentable smile on those poor lips."

Pompilia herself is a creation most characteristic of the optimism of Browning's genius: none can be so damned by heredity as to be past redemption. In this base-born child we have good brought out of evil.

"The sudden existence, dewy clear.
O the rose above the dung-heap, the pure child,
As good as new-created since withdrawn
From the horror of the pre-appointed lot.
. . . . .
Why moralist the sin has saved a soul." *

Besides, it did good to Pietro, and arrested him as he was getting into evil ways: to Violante, for it softened her, and profitably filled her life. Yet sin is sin, and though bad actions may turn out to have done good, yet the penalty must be paid. Violante's confession of her deceit in palming off Pompilia as her own child, right in itself as a reparation to Pietro and of restitution to his heirs, is made a wrong act by her motive of revenge and spite towards Guido, and by forgetting the effects it might have on Pompilia :—

"Woman, confessing crime is healthy work,
And telling truth relieves a liar like you.
But how about my quite unconsidered charge ?
No thought in the way of harm may find out her."

It is an instance of Browning's keen spiritual penetration, that he shows us the impossibility of any reparation: evil must "dree its weird," the penalty be paid to the full. Witness the miserable married life of Pompilia :—

"Chase her about the coop of daily life";

and the tragedy of the three-fold murder. The fact of the vile letter Guido produced is explained thus: Pompilia traced over Guido's characters without understanding them, for she could neither read nor write; while those to, and from Caponsacchi, were forged. There are lovely lines such as—

"So i' the blue of a sudden sulphur blaze,"

and the description of her escape, which begins—

"Ghost-like from dark room to great dark room,
In through the tapestries and out again."

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* Book IV.

Also where Pompilia gives her account of the journey just before the meeting at the inn, between herself, Caponsacchi and Guido :—

"Then something like a huge wave of the sea
Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep,"

down to—

"I submit myself."

How dramatic the description, when, confronted by her husband and Caponsacchi in the bedroom where she had been thus suddenly aroused from sleep, she seizes Guido's sword and uses it against him in defence of her companion, their innocence, and her unborn child.

On Pompilia's relationship with Caponsacchi read these glowing words :—

"Oh, called innocent love, I know !
Only such scarlet fiery innocence,
As most folk would try muffle up in shade,
And if they recognised in critical flash,
From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
His need of—say a woman to perish for."

As an expression of hate, these on Guido :—

"Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act,
So should the loathed form and detested face
Launch themselves into hell and there be lost,
While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms."

This book moves us with a strange pathos—a very passion of pity. Even through this partial appreciation of her, we learn to know and love this exquisite creation of Browning's.

Book IV.—*Tertium Quid.*

"This part of the business,
The judgment of the court is in itself a *tertium quid*, while
. . . . All of you want the other thing—
The extreme law, some verdict neat—complete."

The weak point in Guido's story is pointed out. Had he, when he found his wife and Caponsacchi together, killed them both in hot blood, "one had recognised the power of the pulse." But, instead of the despised cleric, he finds a man, armed and formidable, so he chokes down his indignation, has the two secured by the help of others, and appeals to law, so that the world's verdict is—

"Oh, let us have no syllable o' the rage !
Such rage were a convenient after-thought."

In *Tertium Quid* we are shown how the story on either side can be twisted this way or that. It is, besides, a strong instance of Browning's Shakespearean breadth:[*] even so despicable a wretch as Guido, is still within the pale of human justice, if not sympathy; therefore the weakness on the other side is pointed out, also the deception practised on him by the Comparini, and we are made to feel he has a real cause of complaint. *Tertium Quid* is clear, shrewd, cynical, full of verve, a little long, yet we recognise Browning's motive: it is to serve as a relief to the strain of what has gone before and is to follow; it is also to give us that average judgment, with which every great issue has to deal, yet in spite of its worldly tolerance the impression it leaves on the mind may be summed up in these words:—

> "Hell broke loose on a butterfly,
> A dragon born of rose dew and the morn.
> Yet here is the monster."

This introduces Book V. The first of the four great portraits, Guido. He is drawn at length, and even his setting is carefully arranged, he, the unattractive, the accused, is the first brought before the bar of judgment, as if to give him a fair chance, and not to unduly prejudice us against him. In Book XI. he comes once more, after the others.

This portrait shows the power of the master's hand at its ablest; the others appeal to us of themselves, Guido arrests us in spite of ourselves, and is purely dramatic; for the time the poet *is* Guido, and makes us fully enter into the subtilties of that crooked mind. Brought to a bar more clerical than lay, he begins with the ingenious plea of devotion to the Church. Then he draws a picture which borders on the pathetic, of his poverty linked with his nobility so that we feel almost sorry for him; he contrasts it with the rise of parvenus, which rise he insinuates is due to the useful service of their well-filled purses.

Browning is too great an artist to let him play the hypocrite at first, or openly, nor would he put him altogether outside our sympathies; besides, having confessed under torture, Guido is too clever a rogue to begin by actual falsehood. He keeps in the main to the bare facts of the case, though he suits them to the low level of the audience to which he appeals; while by slight variations he cleverly works out a story which tallies much with that of *Half Rome*. With cynical candour he lays bare his motives for trimming with the Church and the world,—

> "Bat like bide, 'twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege."

Had he whined and snivelled, he would put himself out of court at once, but by a kind of hypocritical frankness, his effrontery does him good, in spite of our loathing for his wickedness. Note his terse and brutal account of his marriage arranged by his brother, Paulo the Abate.

> "A match, said I,
> Done! He proposed all, I accepted all, we performed all."

He adroitly turns the tables on his judges, by hinting that their motives are quite as worldly as his own.

How plausible a description he also gives of the base motives of the Comparini, their selling their daughter for position, and their subsequent discontent with the poverty which was a part of it—just bearable to him, has he not pride, is he not noble?—and which places him above these "cits" who move in the lower sphere of consideration for material comfort.

We feel something like admiration for the ascetic endurance portrayed. Then he contrives to put Pompilia ingeniously in the wrong, by showing how her conduct might appear from his, the injured husband's point of view; nor does he disown his harshness towards her, he likens it to the Church's punishment of offenders, who should take it meekly, not cast mud at their superiors.

Guido cleverly drops a hint that he was poisoned, which was the cause of his want of promptitude at the inn, but he contradicts this by his flimsy excuse of respect for law, and that he only resorted to force when law failed:—

> "No more of law, a voice beyond the law,
> Enters my heart *quis est pro Dominus*."

With such subtilty is this part worked out, that Guido succeeds in half deceiving us that he does believe himself to be injured, and that, long the prey to evil passions, "for lies breed lies," he persuades himself that the murder of Pompilia and the Comparini is a rough kind of justice. He defends his brutality in the execution of those murders,

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[*] A parallel case might be found in Shylock.

by the plea that the sight of Violante threw him into a condition of ungovernable rage.

Even while we are convinced the murders are most deliberate and cold-blooded, we can admire the cleverness with which Guido brings forward as proof of the indignation which forgets, his carelessness in not providing for his own safety after the crime is committed; yet in the end Guido is unconsciously a *self-revealer*, and we see him as the poltroon he really is, who pleads for bare life; yet, how well he sometimes does it! With an eloquence worthy of a better cause,—he asks, why kill "a soldier bee"—

"That yields his life, excuterate with the stroke
Of the sting that saves the hive. I need that life."

See also how he exposes one of his motives, hatred for Caponsacchi, when, dissimulation laid aside, he says:—

"I thought some of the stabs were in his heart,
Or had not been so lavish."

It is in such instances that Browning's knowledge of human nature, his analysis of character are shown. There is also the adroit skill by which Guido brings in his relations, the service he would do the Church; is all this to be cut short, he the last of a noble house? But no! he is not the last for he has a son, then follows a passage which would be magnificent from a really injured husband; he argues first, that the child is none of his, and our blood runs cold at such lines as,—

"This bastard then, a rest for him is made,
As the manner is of vermin, in my flesh."

While even more hateful is his sudden change when he claims the child as his, and that he longs to have him,—

"Give me—for last best gift—my son again,
Whom law makes mine."

Consider the power of such a passage as that beginning,—

"All along you have nipped away just inch by inch."

Book VI.—*Giuseppe Caponsacchi*. In a few lines instinct with life and fire, Caponsacchi draws a contrast between his first trial and this one, touches on the facts of the case, and on *Pompilia*,

"Gasping away the latest breath."

Mark how keen the rapier point of his satire, his comparison of himself as the watch-dog kicked to kennel while

he left his charge to the protection of the law; and is this the end?

At the close of the book he returns to the same charge with a fine scorn, enlarges on the incredulity with which his explanation was first received, while he exposes the low worldly wisdom of his judges' advice to turn his "peccadillo" into a travesty for the amusement of his Eminence the Cardinal, and so win his favour.

But *now* he is a St. George who has rescued the princess; surely the flight itself was a proof of innocence? Had he, as alleged, been so free of the place, what need had they to barter—

"Private bliss for public reprobation."

He feels he has persuaded his present audience, does he not see the judge weeping? "Did I not say you were good and true at bottom?" He was glad that he had helped them to see the truth as he had himself been enabled to see it through Pompilia.

But to return, once again will he, Caponsacchi,

"Burn my soul out in showing you the truth,"

What beauty as well as satire in the lines,

"Saints to do us good must be in heaven,
We never find them saints before at least."

While there follows that exquisite passage, "He is the fool here," in which in a strong flame of pure light he sets forth "The snow-white soul that angels fear to take untimely."

Then he tells his own history, the awakening of his soul when he understood the nature of the vows he, as priest, must take; while he exposes the worldly cynicism of his spiritual superiors, they show him how he can juggle his conscience, for the Church did not need confessors and martyrs, but accomplished men of the world. Following this advice, he lived for pleasure with his idle intellectual Epicureanism, and refined sensualism, whilst he just conformed to the letter of his duties; his chief ambition to please the fine ladies amongst whom he dallied.

In this mood, at the theatre, he saw "Rafael-like," a "lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad." A friend with him throws comfits on her lap, thereby drawing upon them Guido's lynx-eyed attention. The friend alarmed, begs Caponsacchi to beware for the sake of the lady, Guido's wife.

Haunted by this memory other pleasures disgust, he neglects them, and when remonstrated with as to the reason, he with fine satire retorts, "What if I turned Christian? It might be."

Pompilia's pure sad face has made him pause and think how far is his life severed from hers; in this mood there comes to him Margherita, "the masked and muffled mystery," who purported to bring him a love-letter from Pompilia, making assignations, and is the first of many such. It shows that Caponsacchi was noble at heart, for he knew at once they were false, knew they were traps set by Guido, and that his wife could have had nothing to do with them. He fears the court may be incredulous at this confidence, they did not know her, or see how such an act was as impossible for her as it would have been for Rafael's Madonna to have been found with a scorpion in her mouth; still he wishes to stop this persecution for—

"One does Madonna service making clowns
Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy."

At last he so far consents that he goes and stands beneath the terrace where she lived; he sees Pompilia framed in the window as a picture over an altar, yet he still feels it is some trap set by Guido, then she speaks, explains she can neither read nor write, repeats the lies the woman had invented about him, and tells her story, the attempts she made to obtain help by which to escape; failing others she throws herself on the generosity of one she feels must be noble, for, he proffers her assistance "all unprompted save by your own heart."

Further on he points out how the pure mind of Pompilia had seized on the idea of using the devotion he, Caponsacchi, professed towards her, thus turning it from a bad use to a good one, as with the thief,—"Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft." When, however, she saw him she knew at once that all she had been told was false, for he always had been, always would be true:—

"She by the crystalline soul knew me,
Never mistook the signs."

The whole of Pompilia's speech is a masterpiece of beauty and quiet dignity, and shows how profoundly Browning understood human nature at its noblest; shows us also how the child-wife was first *seared* into knowledge through her

own sufferings, and the sin of others "in fire which shrivelled leaf and bud away," then blossomed into life once more, through the mystery of that other life within her; so, she prays him, "Take me as you would a dog I think masterless left." Note the delicacy with which she touches upon the vile love of Guido's brother; and the faith she retains in the Comparini, in the face of neglect.

Under her influence the soul of Caponsacchi undergoes the throe and ecstasy of birth, and rises "with something of a rosy shame, into immortal nakedness"; he dedicates himself to her service, her true knight errant, in those lovely lines which begin, "I have been lifted to the level of her."* It shows how pure his motives are, for he believes "duty to God is duty to her," and that he serves her best by first attending to his daily work.

We come across such exquisite passages as that description of sunset:—

"Turned as into a skirt of God's own robe,
These lancet windows jewelled miracle,"

and, the one on *Pompilia*:—

"The white I saw shine through her was her soul's";

while here is one of Browning's root ideas:—

"All pain must be to work some good in the end."

The flight is at last begun; shut up with her, listening to her conversation, Caponsacchi realises more and more that she is—

"As God's sea glassed in gold."

Gradually we notice by delicate subtle touches that his heart is also awakening; half unknown to himself a very pure and noble love is born; we see the transparency of her soul when she asks if there be in her any sin to confess; surely it was none to leave her husband? for she did it not to save her life, but to save him from further sin, that she, the lamb, should no longer be left as a decoy for the wolf.

Then we have the encounter with Guido at the inn. All this part is powerful, vivid and dramatic beyond description. There was that supreme moment missed, when Caponsacchi could have killed him with his hands on his throat, and so "a spittle wiped off from the face of God."

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* We have the same idea in *Balaustion's Adventure,* when Alkestes is rescued from death by Heracles.

Together with the officers of the law they go up to "the chamber, late my chapel," where Pompilia is awakened suddenly from her heavy sleep of exhaustion. How magnificent the lines from—"She started up, stood erect, face to face" to—"He shook."

Caponsacchi cannot believe she is dead even now, death could not touch one like her "with that leap to life of the pale electric sword Angels go armed with." He appealed to the Church thinking to save her, and instead he sent her to her doom. The Church had punished him also, yet was he blameless of any sin:—

> "I never touched her with my finger tip,
> Except to carry her to the couch that eve
> Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
> As we priests carry the paten."

Yet in the end he shows how well he could have loved and how it would have ennobled them, had they been free:—

> "We rush each on each,
> By no chance but because God wills it so,
> The spark of truth was struck from out our souls,"

until he saw—

> "There was no duty patent to the world,
> Like daring try be good and true myself."

Through the revelation of Pompilia and the knowledge of a human soul, he was led to a comprehension of Christ, and the seed from which this sprung was self-knowledge for "Man's good is knowing he is bad."

In Caponsacchi, Browning shews us that pure disinterested service, noble friendship and guardianship of man for woman is no myth; that love freed from passion can approach the Divine in its selfless abnegation. We see how a generous trust was the spark which kindled latent greatness and goodness until it transmuted the dilettante worldling into the ideal man, in whom a defenceless woman can trust, on whom she may lean.

Book VII.—*Pompilia*. In the beginning a deep human chord is struck, out of the very heart of womanhood and motherhood, when Pompilia says that her one claim to remembrance is "she was mother to a son." "Oh, how good God was that my babe was born!" while it is with intense relief that at the end of her short tragic life she gives that one exultant cry of joy, "All women are not mothers to a boy." Wounded to death with twenty-two thrusts, five deadly, all her thoughts are with the baby she saw for two days only, but the quickening of whose life had given her courage to fight for her own.

How pathetic it all is about this son, Gaetano, her choice for him of a patron saint whose name was new, because he may be "carefuller perhaps to guard a namesake than those old saints grow." We see how it broke her heart to learn the Comparini were not her parents: that she was instead "the careless crime of an unknown man, ... of a woman known too well." Almost every line deserves quotation for its beauty and power:—

> "The day when one is dying, sorrows change
> Into not altogether sorrow like."

In *that* we have a deep truth, in *this* a pathetic sigh,—

> "To me at least was never evening yet,
> But seemed far beautifuller than its day";

or, the comparison of herself at her marriage, to a lamb who

> "Only lay down to let herself be clipped,"

so young, so childlike that she compares her husband with the ugly physician who cured her in sickness; in the same way marriage will work some mysterious change, "but neither scarecrow will return."

(To be continued.)